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# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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## ELECTION IN HIGH SCHOOLS

I AM about to discuss a question respecting which at the present moment there is a wide difference of opinion. In this age, whose rapid advancement defies prophecy and exceeds hope, we must all acknowledge the right of individual judgment, whether that judgment is based upon observation, imagination, or experience. I do not arrogate to myself a greater wisdom than I acknowledge my peers to possess, and I bow graciously before the conclusions which a deeper knowledge and a richer research have forced upon my superiors.

In the economy of the Divine architecture, as exhibited in the marvelous divergence of mental traits, there has always been a conservative contingent that has prevented the inauguration of any new movement in its entirety, that has blocked the wheels of reform and progress for a time, that has insisted on the ways that were being better than the ways that are.

I respect that conservatism because I believe its chief elements are caution, a religious desire to be self-cultured and well-poised, and a commendable zeal to make haste slowly when changed conditions seem to threaten established traditions. Conservatism is necessary as a check upon such a sudden inauguration of radical reforms as to shock an apathetic and unthinking community.

But conservatism unopposed, left to its stagnant conditions means debilitation, decrepitude, decay. There are many people, professedly learned, who are so environed, so biased, and, shall I say it, so selfish, that they will with stubborn energy decry a theory until its truth has been absolutely demonstrated in practice, and will throw every possible obstacle in the way of its demonstration, because they *are* opposed to the theory.

For such I have no sympathy; with such I have no patience. They hold the same relation to reform, in an opposite direction, as the anarchist holds to government. The one brooks no changes, the other brooks no stability. The one worships tradition, the other tramples upon it. Neither is justified, both are a plague.

I believe in experiment. Every advance in every field of human activity for five thousand years has been the result of patient, plodding, persevering experiment. Continents have been discovered and wild wastes reclaimed; mountains have been leveled and valleys made to blossom; the bowels of the earth have been explored and the material of the sun analyzed; details of disasters reach us before they occur, and the world is reduced to a conversing community. Conservatism and caution, however, have brought none of these changes to pass. They have all been wrought through the power of reasoning and the pluck of radicalism.

Every step of progress the world has made has taken place against opposition the most violent and vicious, and the good accomplished has been in direct ratio with the opposition encountered.

What has been true in the material world, in the industrial world, the commercial world, the world of exploration, discovery and invention, has been equally true in the educational world. The rate of progress, however, has been slower here than in any other department of human endeavor, because education fosters conservatism, and educators prefer to teach as they were taught, and thus the sins of the fathers have been visited upon the children to the third and fourth, yes, to the thirty-third and thirty-fourth generation of those who knew no better. Our institutions

of learning are deep-rooted in the soil of mediæval monasticism. Notwithstanding all the social, industrial, and religious changes that have marked the passing centuries, we are still more or less fettered by tradition. If the same influences had held sway in transportation, in agriculture, and manufacture, which have controlled our educational affairs, we would still be riding in the stage-coach, using the tallow dip, breaking ground with the hand-plough and receiving intelligence from Hong Kong once in six months.

What was true in the time of the Renaissance is not true today; what was important then is waste now; the manna of culture then was only for the few; now the multitude is to be fed, and since no miracle-maker walks among us, the five loaves and the two fishes are not enough.

Language study was the turret and foundation, the cornerstone and cap-sheaf of the old education, but of the new it will be simply the foundation, and only a part of that.

For over two hundred years there was absolute lethargy, the seeming inertia of stagnation in educational affairs. To be sure a light blazed forth here and there, now and then, and has never gone out, but the world in general has sat in the shadow of the cloister and worshiped idols. The establishment of every technological school, every normal school, every so-called business college, yes, every public high school in all our broad domain, was a protest spoken modestly at first, but now thundered against the unjust demands of our higher institutions, whose roots I have said received their nurture from the soil of tradition. All my public utterances and all my private endeavors the last few years have been in the direction of producing a spirit of harmony between what the colleges would like to have and what the public schools were made to supply.

I have no warfare to make upon the private schools or academies. They are unique institutions. They were designed to be tributary to the colleges. The stream flows direct to the ocean. There is not the slightest change in the current, and the banks are always the same. To change the figure, the college is the master, the private schools the serfs; the one dictates, the other

obeys. It is purely a case of demand and supply. Were some private academy, for instance Morgan Park, able to accommodate all the boys (heaven help the girls), who proposed to enter our neighboring university, it would be necessary for the university only to publish its requirements, and the academy, if given time, could easily see them fulfilled. There would then be no need of conferences for coöperation and interchange of opinions. There never has been and there never can be any vital connection between the colleges and the high schools, based upon such an arrangement.

The high schools are not and cannot be college preparatory schools in any such sense. Let us suppose, however, this to be their special mission, and that they awaited the promulgation of a curriculum that would express the views of every member of the faculty of some great university as to the subjects to be pursued and the amount of work to be accomplished in each, do we not all know that the program would be one that could not be completed in ten years?

From the department of ancient classics would come the arguments hoary with age, and honored by tradition, demanding a large place for Latin and Greek; equally forcible and more utilitarian would be the claims for the modern languages, including the mother tongue; some would maintain that modern foreign should precede the ancient, and others that the ancient should antedate the modern.

The mathematician, in close-knit logic, would expound the importance of plane and spherical trigonometry and all that precedes it as fundamentally essential for the best superstructure, while others would laugh at such presumption.

The scientific professor, all enthused with the worship of nature, in its intimate and intricate relations to the daily life of man, would scoff at the immoral waste of human life in the study of classic mummyism, and prove beyond controversy that the child should become acquainted with his environments, and have his eyes and ears and heart and brain opened and awakened to the sights and sounds and beauties and potencies of the earth and air and sky about him, all filled with the developed and

undeveloped agencies for man's utilization: physical geography, physiology, biology, physics, chemistry, astronomy, he needs them all; then comes the man who prophesies the future from the past and says that history, ancient, mediæval, modern, English, American, is essential that the child may connect himself with the past and understand the age in which he lives. The program is by no means complete. There should be of course no abatement of the study of literature from earliest childhood to latest age, and we must not forget the advocates of psychology, without a knowledge of which there can be no correct teaching, no respectable parental training; nor the advocates of sociology, civics, economics, commercial geography, commercial law, the history of industries and transportation, of commerce, each and all giving the child a proper mental balance in his relations to business pursuits. I do not mean to be farcical, I mean to be logical, and I challenge proof to the contrary of my statement that there are not three men in any institution, representing different departments of human knowledge, who could agree upon a curriculum of studies for all the pupils of our public high schools, and, if they could, the public high schools would not accept their conclusions.

What then is to be done? Will the college and the high school each pursue its own way regardless of the other? Perhaps so, but the high school will not suffer thereby.

What is this institution called the high school? Whence came it, and whither is it bound? What are its obligations and its limitations? Who own it and who have a right to control it? Space will not permit an answer to all these questions, but surely there are some things that it is not. Although all our educational institutions have developed from the top down, the high school will not acknowledge itself to be the offspring of the college, but rather the child of the people, legitimately born in the order of Providence.

Its function primarily and specifically is to supplement and amplify the work of the elementary school. In the evolution of civilization, during the last fifty years, more than one third has been added to the sum total of human knowledge, and,

therefore, four years of study beyond the elementary school will not give the children of today any broader horizon than their fathers had a half century ago.

The high school is not for the purpose of gratifying the whims and fancies of the teachers, whether of the school or college. Too long have prejudice and selfish egotism prevailed in the making of programs. Neither psychology nor common sense (I use them as synonyms), has been allowed to come in to abate the bias or calm the passions of men who have fought for their favorite study like half-backs on a football field. It is about time for us to awaken to a realization of the truth that all schools are, or ought to be, for the welfare of the child, for the development of those talents the protoplasm of which has been implanted by the Divine Architect, and that, however magnetic, or eloquent, or profound we may be, it is impossible for us to build in the child or to make out of the child that of which the Creator has not first planted the germ. It is the study of the child, then, that demands our thought, investigation, and research. We must know something of his tastes, his talents, his needs, his limitations, his possibilities, that we may economize his time, secure his confidence, and aid in bringing the best that is in him to its highest perfection.

We have arranged our educational programs for a purely imaginative creation, an automaton, a *genus homo* whom nobody ever saw, and neglected all the species, the real, living, breathing potentialities of the universe, whose tastes and talents are as infinite in difference and diverse in possibility as are the illimitable powers of the architect of the heavens, the earth, and all therein contained, whom we call God. Sameness is not stamped upon any two of the divine creations. In nature no two germs are alike, and the influence of sun, shade, and soil in their development are unlike. In the one case the violet sweet, in the other, the stalwart oak; each performing its own but neither the other's functions. When one comes to the highest creation, man, the manipulator of nature, fashioned in the image of his Creator, we neglect this principle of infinite diversity and act as if there were some fixed intellectual diet that all young people needed in

order to insure the full fruitage of divinely implanted germs, notwithstanding the fact that the world groans beneath the burden of professional and business failures, the result of misguidance in the preparation for life.

The public school is to be the school of the people, with a program rich in language, history, mathematics, science, civics, commerce, manual training, economics and household arts, and any and every study which makes for moral integrity, good citizenship, noble manhood and pure womanhood.

Only that knowledge which is assimilated and appropriated becomes real education. In the unfolding of the mental powers there must be garnered the largest possible amount of useful potential knowledge, which may be applied in the conduct of every business, in the success of every profession, in the amelioration of humanity, in the development of civilization, and in the blossoming of all those graces which are the crown of true citizenship in a government of the people.

Unlike Mr. Briggs in the *Atlantic Monthly*, I am writing my views, not my doubts, and giving expression not to a mood but to a conviction. He says the new education has made three discoveries, of which the first is: "Education should always recognize the fitness of different minds for different work." He then proceeds with his doubts, and essays to laugh the proposition out of court. The discovery, however, still remains. The emancipation proclamation has been issued; long since the colleges, with Harvard, the oldest and greatest of them all, leading the way, broke the shackles that bound them within the limited horizon of the past, and proclaimed freedom to those who bowed at their altars.

Humanity, individualism, is to be the paramount issue in education. The professor who believes that there is no substitute for his specific, that the decoction which he brews in the inner cell of his cloister is essential to all real intellectual growth, no longer dictates the curriculum. The student himself makes his choice, and notwithstanding the jeers and gibes of those who scoff at the plan, and claim that he seeks for "snaps" in his studies, the proofs and the truths are all to the contrary. What



is true of the college is measurably true of the high school. These colleges of the people, supported by the people, for the education of the people, must in a large measure meet their demands, accede to their wishes, respect their opinions, on the ground that taxation and representation in republican institutions are inseparable. We are familiar with the reasons urged against the principle of election in high schools; the immaturity of the pupil; the dormant condition of the talents; the absence of vocational plans; the danger of selection along the lines of least resistance; the claim that power, power to think and to do, the end of education, comes through the mastery of the distasteful and the difficult. The principle of election, a very unfortunate term, does not ignore these things. It is not intended in its application to give the pupil a complete choice of subjects, leaving out of consideration the aid and counsel of parent and teacher. The principal and teachers will always be the most potent factors in the arrangement of every child's curriculum. The parent has a right, however, to intervene and give his views, and often, very often, the child is the wisest judge of all. Neither do I quarrel with those who would have some constants in secondary education, provided there shall be no hard fast rule to which there can be no exception.

That a pupil must have four years of Latin, or three years of mathematics, or two years of any specific study, in order to receive a diploma is absurd, and such regulations have been endured only because of the infinite patience of a longsuffering constituency. For a college to demand of a student some knowledge of three foreign languages before he is allowed to cross its threshold to secure a higher education in accordance with some well-defined plans, is equally unjust, irrational, and undemocratic.

The high school is to be an institution where the dominant interests of the individual child are to be served; where general culture through a variety of studies responsive to the aptitudes of the pupil is to be secured; where the hand and eye as well as the heart and head are to be trained to their best uses; where the physical and the moral are to receive due attention with the

mental; where, indeed, the pupil, by different methods adapted to different needs, is to be put in possession of those means by which he may secure a useful, contented, and happy livelihood. The Procrustean system of education is a thing of the past; no fixed curriculum for a large class of pupils will longer be tolerated. There must be wide scope and large flexibility in school programs. Studies should be selected for or by pupils, not to please whims or satisfy prejudices, not to deplete one class nor to fill another, not to make an easy working program nor to lighten any one's labors, but to give to the pupil that which it is within his power to appropriate, assimilate, and utilize; that which will make the years that ought to be devoted to school life enjoyable and profitable, those studies that shall so enrich the nature, develop the character, and inspire the soul, that he may feel that to him there is no place like the school. This can be done only when teachers are so cultured, so trained, so filled with the altruistic spirit, that any study will be measurably attractive under their instruction, and when the pupils themselves shall be in possession of a natural rather than an acquired aptitude for their studies. Instruction must be excellent, and the attitude of the pupils subjectively pleasing.

How old and yet how pregnant with meaning the trite expression, "You may lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink." You may possibly compel a boy to go to school, but you cannot make him learn.

"Blessed be drudgery," and the more difficult the task the richer the gain therefrom, are beautiful theories; but not under such laws do flowers blossom nor fruit ripen.

The law of adaptation is everywhere prevalent in nature, and it has equal jurisdiction in education. Study is of little worth when the interest is not awakened. No one can set down in indisputable category the educational value of any study. Tomes have been written, history has been searched, lives of great men made sublime have been appealed to, to prove that the study of Greek is the greatest instrument that God ever placed in human hands for the development of mental power, but it is all an opinion. Equally incontestable is the proof which the advocates

of any other study bring forward to sustain their theory, and the world begins to think and to act upon the thought that the value of a study depends on the nature of the student and the character of his instruction.

The subject of elasticity in programs of study is dominating educational thought today, and you can no more stop its leavening power than you can stay the working of the natural laws of evolution. The few may contend against it and take up arms against a sea of troubles, but by opposing cannot end them. Man and his environment, nature and her laws, history and the warning it gives and the lesson it teaches, sociology in the relations to the development of harmonious conditions, the industries by which man is supported, art not for art's sake, music not for music's sake, but to impart an inspiration to life, to lend a charm to labor—these, and none more diligently, more pleasantly, nor more profitably, are to be studied in the colleges of the people, as teachers may suggest, pupils desire, and parents dictate.

I cannot better close this appeal for a rational election in high-school programs than to use the words of Comenius, whose burning thoughts, smothered for two hundred years, are bursting into a conflagration that shall reduce to ashes the medievalism and charlatanism of our modern education.

“The attempt to compel nature into a course into which she is not inclined, is to quarrel with nature and is fruitless striving. Since the teacher is the servant, not the master or the reconstructor of nature, let him not drive forcibly when he sees the child attempting that for which he has no skill. Let every one unhindered proceed with that to which, in accordance with the will of heaven, his natural inclination attracts him, and he will later be enabled to serve God and humanity.”

A. F. NIGHTINGALE